

STEAMBOAT STAMPMILL
Brush Creek Canyon
Jacksonville Vicinity
Jackson County
Oregon

HAER No. OR-57

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

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Location: Brush Creek Canyon, Carberry Creek drainage of the Applegate Valley; Applegate Ranger District, Rogue River National Forest; 25 miles southwest of Jacksonville, Jackson County, Oregon.

USGS Carberry Creek Quadrangle (7.5') (formerly USGS Ruch Quadrangle [15'])).

UTM coordinates: Zone:10. Northing:4659118.1890 Easting:483824.0928.
Elevation: 2,602 feet above sea level.

Date of Construction: 1912.

Significance: The historic significance of the Steamboat Stampmill structure lies in: (1) its direct association with historic gold mining activities in southwestern Oregon in general and in the Steamboat Mountain mining district in particular (with the building's period of historic significance dating from the immediate pre-World War I years through the "Depression mining era" of the 1930s); and (2) its character as an example of a large, simply but ingeniously constructed building used to shelter gold ore-milling operations. The mill was built in a remote and rugged area of the Siskiyou Mountains, largely with native materials (e.g., peeled Douglas-fir poles for framework, hand-split sugar pine shakes for roofing), and probably by a crew of fewer than a half-dozen workers. The Steamboat Stampmill building exemplifies the utilitarian workmanship and "self-reliance" used by the typically small-scale lode mining operations of southwestern Oregon. It is one of the few stampmill structures that remains standing in this region.

Description: The Steamboat Stampmill structure is a peeled-pole structure covered by a shake roof and rough-cut, random-width plank walls. Round nails and spikes are used throughout. Approximately 80 feet long by 23 feet wide and up to 25 feet high, the structure is situated on a 45% slope; the sloping, multi-level configuration of the structure enabled ore-bearing rock to be fed through the milling and gold-recovery process by means of

gravity. Much of the original equipment housed in the structure (e.g., gas engine, two-stamp mill) has been removed. It is evident that the building contained four main levels, representing the main stages in the milling and recovery process: (1) ore-receiving (uppermost level; adjacent to a ore-sled/truck access road), (2) ore-sorting and ore-holding (second level; consisting of ore chute/grizzly from level one leading down to an ore bin; reached by a spur road from the main truck access road), (3) stampmilling (third level; former site of two-stamp mill used for crushing ore into fine particles, plus associated equipment), and (4) amalgamating (final level; site of amalgamation tables where quicksilver-coated riffles captured the gold which was washed down from the milling level. (After processing in the stampmill structure, the resulting "amalgam" would have been removed and the gold recovered at a different location by means of "retorting off" the quicksilver.)

Since the 1960s, the structure has experienced accelerated deterioration, in part due to vandalism (e.g., removal of equipment and wall boards) but largely because of natural causes (advanced decay of shake roof; collapse of an entire section due to windthrown tree falling across the roof). The entire south elevation is open to the weather (wall boards having fallen off or been removed) and the lower level roof and walls are totally collapsed. The roof no longer shelters the interior of the structure from rain or snow, and many peeled posts have rotten bases and joints; some of these framing members are askew or loose from adjacent components of the framework; numerous floorboards are loose or missing. The structure has a "rickety" appearance which simply illustrates the fact that much of it is structurally unsound. The stamp-mill, engine, and other machinery have been removed (ca. 1970s-80s), evidently by miners for re-use elsewhere; it is believed that the amalgamation tables currently remain at the structure, concealed beneath the debris of the collapsed roof, but the extreme safety hazard prevents verification of this assumption.

History: Gold was first discovered in the Siskiyou Mountains of southwestern Oregon in 1851-2. Although placer operations remained dominant, the first significant lode ("hard-rock") mining in the region began at Steamboat Mountain in the early 1860s. The Steamboat Mine, said to have produced \$350,000 in gold before 1870, apparently exhausted its high-paying ore within the first decade of operation. For the remainder of the 19th century and on into the first half of the 20th century, small-scale and sporadic lode-mining operations characterized the Steamboat Mountain vicinity. One of the early 20th century miners was Jake Shearer, who is thought to have built the Steamboat Stampmill structure in 1912. Shearer sold several of his mining claims, and apparently the mill site as well, to D.W. Wright in 1927. Wright and his partner, a Mr. Myer, tunneled several adits in the vicinity, using the stampmill to recover gold during the

Depression-era "gold boom" of the 1930s. The stampmill was used intermittently during the 1940s-50s and possibly as late as the 1960s-70s before the milling and some of the amalgamating equipment was removed or became unusable.

Sources: Etter, Douglas, "Cultural Resource Reconnaissance: Dreamboat Timber Sale," C.R. Job RR-585, Rogue River National Forest, 1982.

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Parks, H.M. and A.M. Swartley, Handbook of the Mining Industry of Oregon, Oregon Dept. of Geology and Mineral Industries, 1916.

Historian: Jeff LaLande, USDA Forest Service, Rogue River National Forest, 1991.